

Did you know.... that during the 19th century San Francisco became the headquarters for the state's largest transportation empire? Yes, it's true. Our story begins with the "Big Four": Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker, Collis Huntington, and Mark Hopkins. During the gold- panning part of the Gold Rush (1848-1860) the Big Four started out as merchants in Sacramento. Stanford was a grocer.

Crocker owned a dry goods store, and Huntington and Hopkins were partners in a hardware store. In 1863 the Big Four started building the Central Pacific Railroad which, using several thousand Chinese laborers, started in Sacramento, crossed the Central Valley, climbed up and over the Sierra Nevada, laid track across Nevada into Utah where in 1869 at Promontory Point the Central Pacific joined up with the Union Pacific coming westward. The Transcontinental Railroad now united the West Coast with the East Coast. Travel between the two coasts dropped from several months to approximately five days. California at long last ended its isolation and was joined with the rest of the nation!

Even before the Transcontinental Railroad was completed in 1869, the Big Four planned to move the western terminus of the Central Pacific from Sacramento to the Bay Area. Accordingly, through a series of machinations, they gained control of the Oakland waterfront. They tried to gain control of the San Francisco waterfront. Upon meeting opposition to the Big Four's unreasonable demands from San Francisco itself, the Big Four ended up controlling only 60 acres around what is now 4th and Townsend streets south of Market St.

The "Big Push" to the Bay Area then began. Accordingly, the Central Pacific built its lines from Sacramento to Lathrop near Stockton. From Lathrop the railroad turned westward to the Niles Canyon in the foothills separating the Central Valley from the Bay Area. Crossing the Niles Canyon, the Central Pacific finally arrived in Oakland from the southern end of the Bay. Ferry service then transported passengers and goods across the Bay

to San Francisco. All transcontinental traffic followed this route until a decade later when a shorter route, using ferries to transfer trains across the Carquinez Straits, reached the Bay at its northern end. During all of this time Oakland remained the physical terminus of the Transcontinental Railroad. With this route, the Central Pacific controlled all railroad traffic coming from the east to the Bay Area.

In 1873, the Big Four moved the headquarters of the Central Pacific from Sacramento to San Francisco. The new headquarters now stood at the 4th and Townsend location. To the dismay of the City's upper class, jealous that a group of upstart shop owners from the hinterlands owned such wealth, the Big Four moved themselves and their families from Sacramento to San Francisco. By building large mansions on Nob Hill, the Big Four then embarked on a display of riches that dazzled ordinary San Franciscans. Stanford was the first. In 1876 he built an Italian villa on Nob Hill at the corner of California and Powell streets (where the Stanford Court Hotel stands today.) The mansion boasted the largest private dining room in the West and a two story rotunda in the center supported by giant pillars. Next to build was Mark Hopkins, or rather Mary Hopkins, Mark's wife, who located their mansion next to Stanford's at the corner of California and Pine Streets (where the Mark Hopkins Hotel is today). Mary Hopkins outdid the Stanfords by building a mansion which, according to one historian, resembled "an almost whimsical fairy castle of wooden towers, Gothic spires, and ornamentation run riot." (See Rand Richards, *Historic San Francisco*, p. 144). Both Stanford and Crocker employed laborers from the Central Pacific to build large retaining walls. The granite in the retaining walls was from the same Rocklin quarry that supplied the lighter shade of granite now seen on the outside walls of the State Capitol in Sacramento. Crocker built his mansion one block away from Stanford and Hopkins at the corner of California and Taylor streets (where Grace Cathedral stands today). Across the Street was Huntington's mansion (now a city park) in which Huntington

spent little time all the while preferring to live in New York and Washington where he could lobby the Railroad's interests with the federal government. The Earthquake and Fire of 1906 destroyed all four mansions. (see Rand Richards, *Historic San Francisco*, pp. 142-144).

In the meantime, the Big Four acquired the California and Oregon Railroad and constructed the Shasta Route stretching from the Bay Area to Sacramento and then through the upper Sacramento Valley to Portland. With this route the Big Four controlled all railroad traffic coming from the north to the Bay Area.

With the Big Four controlling all railroad traffic coming to the Bay Area from the east and north, there remained only the southern route to the Bay Area for the Big Four to control. West of San Francisco lay the Pacific Ocean making railroad access to the City impossible. The southern route, then, would complete the Big Four's grip on the Bay Area.

As luck would have it, there was a small railroad known as the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad ("the SF&SJRR") running south between San Francisco and San Jose. Peter Donohoe, the owner of the Union Iron Works operating south of Market, was one of the founders of the SF&SJRR and built from his factory the first locomotive to run on the railroad's tracks. In 1870, one year after the Transcontinental Railroad was completed; the Big Four acquired the SF&SJRR. The southern route from and to the Bay Area came under the Big Four's control.

But more importantly, at the same time the Big Four acquired the SF&SJRR, they also acquired a companion railroad called the Southern Pacific incorporated originally by Peter Donohue and William Ralston, the CEO of the Bank of California (for more on William Ralston, see *Did You Know*, Clarion, August, 2015). The newly-acquired Southern Pacific had not laid any track but held the ultimate prize: the right from the federal government in 1866 to build a railroad from San Francisco to San Diego.

Now the Big Four controlled all railroad traffic coming from the north (The Oregon and California Railroad), from the east (the Central Pacific and the Transcontinental Railroad), and from the south (the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad). With the acquisition of the Southern Pacific having the right from the federal government to build a railroad from San Francisco to San Diego, the Big Four, operating from San Francisco, now stood ready to dominate all railroad traffic not only in the southern part of the state but in the southwest portion of the United States as well.

(Next time: the Second Transcontinental Railroad)

(Sources: Rawls and Bean, California, An Interpretive History, 9th ed., pp.181-185; Richards, Rand, Historic San Francisco, pp.142-144; Raynor, Richard, The Associates, pp.116-120; Rice, Bullough, Orsi, The Elusive Eden, p.279; Olmsted, Nancy, The Railroads Are Coming, 1860-1873 Found SF; San Francisco and San Jose Railroad, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia; Southern Pacific Transportation Company, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia; The Lost Railroad Tracks of the Mission and Noe Valley, Hidden Histories, Curbed SF; Woodward, Lucinda, A Documentary History of California's State Capitol, pp. 44-47.)